Community Technology Fund 2002

Application Form

Project Title: Ashland Digital City Hall

Submitting Entity: City of Ashland

Grant Amount Requested: $7,629

Project Contact Information (Name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail address):

>   Chris Anderson
>
>   City Administrator
>
>   2304 Silver Street
>
>   Ashland, NE 68003
>
>   (402) 944-3387 (phone)
>
>   (402) 944-3386 (fax)
>
>   ctyadm@navix.net

Executive Summary

   The City of Ashland wishes to purchase a LaserFiche system to scan all City documents into a format that is easily searchable, provides more convenient access to the public and our staff, and allows for secure, off-site storage of City records. Many City records have seriously deteriorated, and continue to be damaged the more they are handled. Our proposed project provides an alternative means of viewing our records, with the added benefit of providing access to those same records on the internet for easy access by the public. We will also demonstrate our project to a number of other interested cities, so we may all benefit through collaborative learning and cooperation.

1) Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

Problem Statement: City records and documents are notoriously difficult to access and disseminate due to sheer volumes, diversity of topics, 100+ years of records, and turnover in staff. Accessing these records is very time-consuming for staff, and is inconvenient for the public. These records are also vulnerable to unexpected disasters.

The purchase of a LaserFiche system would allow City records to be transferred into digital files. These files will most commonly be in a "text" format which allows easy use across different systems, and allows an easy transfer "PDF" format for internet use. Our **Goals and Objectives** are as follows:

1) *Dissemination of Information* – We will initially focus on converting City Ordinances, Resolutions, and City Council Minutes to a digital format. These records will then be transferred to the Ashland Web Site for easy access from any internet connection. This will provide benefits in these areas:
   a. Economic Development – Any potential developer will have access to the laws, rules and regulations of the community, and particularly, full access to the entire Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Regulations, and Subdivision Regulations.
   b. Local Information – The population of Ashland works primarily in Omaha and Lincoln, and a great deal of our population cannot visit City Hall during regular office hours. Residents would have the ability to access city records at their convenience, to be saved, printed or accessed according to their needs. We will implement an educational program to inform the citizens of the availability of this information.
   c. Historical Information – The City of Ashland has a rich history, which is increasingly being drawn upon for economic development purposes. We continue to promote our history and develop historic sites in the community. Our old city records are difficult to access and are in a cumbersome format. This project will allow easy access to city records dating back to the original incorporation of the city. As more records become accessible, the historic portrait of Ashland will be more clearly painted.

d. <u>Browse Ability</u> – Sometimes people know they need records, but don't know exactly where to look. Any person with access to the internet will have the ability to "browse" our records much more efficiently. Today, pulling boxes of files and old books would be necessary. A search could take hours or days. The new system would allow for a key-word search, and browsing through a keyboard and monitor.

2) ***Responsiveness and Accountability*** – Open access to government information is a central concept of democracy. This project will enhance the responsiveness and accountability of Ashland government as follows:

   a. <u>Responsiveness</u> – We regularly receive requests for information from years gone by. For example, a resident may ask about a certain decision made by the City Council, but only knows a general time-frame of when it happened. The staff must then search through years of old minutes, looking for relevant information. The staff is then taken away from other important work for sometimes hours on end. Our proposed project would put these records into a digital format, accessed by a key-word search. A search that took hours could now take only seconds! The person making the request could have the record printed out, emailed, or taken on a disk.

   b. <u>Accountability</u> – The availability of public documents is what makes us accountable. Any technology that improves our ability to quickly access and distribute information makes us more accountable. Most cities maintain "deep files" that contain old, rarely used documents. Our accountability suffers from our inability to efficiently access these records. Our project would make those files accessible.

3) ***Backup of Records*** – A fact of life in Ashland, as in most small communities, is that one fire can destroy most city records. Our files are located in one building. The most critical records are kept in fire-proof safes. However, due to budget and space constraints, most of our records would be destroyed in a fire, tornado, or other disaster. Having our records in a digital format will allow us to store these records in remote locations. We will make multiple copies, and store them at a local bank and at the City Library. If our original files are destroyed, we will have backup copies available.

4) ***Protection of Records*** – Many of our documents have aged to the point of being brittle. Each time they are handled, they break apart or

are degraded in some other way. By providing a digital copy, we can better preserve the original documents.

5) ***Demonstration*** – We intend to take this technology "on the road" in the following ways:

   a. <u>Collaboration</u> – We have engaged in discussions with other communities regarding the use of this technology. As we implement this technology, we will be demonstrating our project to the cities of Aurora, Central City, Waverly, and the Village of Greenwood. We will explore the possibility of an interlocal agreement for the shared use of this technology, if at all possible. At a minimum, these other communities will be observing our project as a model for use in their own city. We will also share our experiences with any other interested community.

   b. <u>Community Organizations</u> – We will formally present our technology to organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, in an effort to promote the new accessibility of City Hall, and to promote the use of technology in general.

6) ***Consistency with Technology Plan*** – The City of Ashland has established a number of Technology Goals to take advantage of advances that have come about. In the past year, we implemented a program to switch from manual, book-read water meters, to a Radio-Read system that dramatically reduces staff time in reading meters. This LaserFiche system is the next Technology Goal of our community, and this grant application is consistent with the established Technology Plan of Ashland.

Activities – We would propose to purchase the LaserFiche system and a laptop computer to administer, store, and demonstrate the project. Upon delivery of the computer and LaserFiche system, staff would begin scanning the documents to the digital format. All ordinances, resolutions and City Council minutes would be scanned, archived and placed on the Ashland Web Site for public access. Due to the speed of this system, we expect to complete this task by the Fall of 2002. We would then call in our partner communities to demonstrate and evaluate our progress. As we achieve a comfort level with our progress, we will begin archiving the remaining city records. We will establish storage sites for copies of all archived documents. We anticipate this to be a set of 20-30 CD-ROM disks, which will be accessible by any computer, requiring very little storage space.

Outcomes – We expect to provide a dramatically increased level of accessibility to city documents and records. Our internet tracking software will allow us to identify the level of use, trends in what is being sought, and methods of better providing access to the information.

We expect a tremendous increase in non-resident access to city information. For example:

- Other Nebraska communities can search our ordinances to see how we handle different situations.
- Tourists visiting the area can access information that may assist in their visit.
- Potential developers can review our zoning requirements, building fees or tax rates.
- Historians can read the official record of our community.
- Genealogists can search the cemetery records of the City.

We expect a tremendous increase in resident access to city information For example:

- Local builders may search ordinances setting building permit fees, zoning regulations and other relevant information.
- A resident could search for city actions relative to legal descriptions near their property.
- The minutes of a recent City Council meeting could be read without calling City Hall to mail a copy.
- The City Ordinance Book could be browsed, just to get up-to-speed on some of our regulations.

2) Project Justification

I believe this project addresses all 3 of the Funding Priorities as follows:

First, the economic development prospects of the community will be enhanced. We know that Ashland has an extremely competitive location, being half way between Omaha and Lincoln on Interstate 80. Our biggest obstacle to development has been getting our message out, and making the facts of our situation easily accessible to the outside world. By having full access to city documents on the internet, our prospects in attracting developers will be enhanced. To a potential developer, time is money. If a

developer has to jump through hoops to get information on a site, he/she will move on to another location.

Second, the delivery of local government services will be enhanced. Most immediately, access to information will be incredibly expanded. Since information is such a valuable resource, we are effectively empowering our citizens to be better informed, better equipped to participate in the process, and breaking down barriers to responsive democracy. As time passes, this project will certainly assist the City of Ashland in moving toward E-Government initiatives, including perhaps online bill paying, online building permit or burn permit applications, and other enhancements to government service delivery. This project will provide a giant leap forward for us.

Third, providing access to city records is an innovative means of service delivery, particularly addressing the needs of residents who mostly work out of town. While some large cities such as Lincoln have been able to put many records on the internet, this ability has not yet reached small communities on a wide scale. I believe our project has the ability to become a model for the state, and may be copied by many other communities.

Fourth, a key component of this project is collaboration with other peer communities. We have made specific commitments to the communities of Aurora, Central City, Waverly and Greenwood to share this technology, and to learn as a group. We hope to take the Ashland experience and evaluate means of reducing the costs for the other communities. This may mean sharing the physical system. Or, they might purchase licenses to the software and use our hardware. Whatever the outcome, we will work collaboratively with Aurora, Central City, Waverly and Greenwood to service a constituency far beyond the boundaries of the City of Ashland.

3) Expected Benefits

Tangible Benefits: Dramatic Decline in the time it takes to provide city documents, New access to files previously in "deep storage", Greater awareness of documents the city has available, Accessibility of documents outside of "working hours", Convenient access to documents without traveling to City Hall.

<u>Intangible Benefits</u>: Greater City accountability, Greater citizen confidence in the system, reduced suspicions that the city is "hiding stuff", Enhanced sense of "openness" in city government.

<u>Economic Benefits</u>: If any developer becomes more inclined to consider investing in Ashland, a clear economic benefit would be realized.

<u>Long-Term Cost Savings</u>: Tremendous time-savings will be realized by city staff. Our technology plan, in particular, aims to realize time savings for staff. In a growing city such as ours, the only way to slow the growth in the number of staff is to create time-savings for those who already exist. This project will delay the time when additional office staff will be needed. In addition, users of city documents will realize cost and time savings by accessing information from their home or office computers. Fewer trips to City Hall will be necessary.

4) Technical Impact

The following components will be necessary for this project:
1) LaserFiche System:
      LaserFiche Executive Software   Snapshot Software
      Adrenaline Capture Engine
      Canon High Speed Scanner
         This is a package system marketed by "The Office Technology Experts" out of Lincoln. This system has been implemented primarily in larger cities across the nation, and is endorsed and promoted by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. The system is scalable, and we have selected a package most appropriate for our needs.

2) Laptop Computer – We will purchase a laptop computer which specifically includes a CDR drive to burn CD's of the archived documents, Microsoft Office software for viewing Word and Excel files, and a modem to transfer files to our internet server. Since computer prices change rapidly, we have set a budget of $2,029 for this component, and will purchase the most powerful system available at the time for that cost. We have selected a laptop over a desktop to provide portability. We will take the laptop to off-site locations for demonstrations. Since we do not have adequate office space for a new desktop workstation, a laptop is essential to the program.

3) Internet Access and Server – The City of Ashland maintains a website at http://www.ashland-ne.com. We have contracted for server space with a private company, and will store documents generated through this project on that server. A backup computer will be available to transfer data to the server. The costs associated with the internet service is not included in the parameters of this grant.

5) Technical Issues

The LaserFiche system is a widely used system endorsed and promoted by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. The system allows for compatibility with virtually any system. Files are initially saved in very basic text files, compatible with any word processing program. The system is designed specifically to address compatibility issues, and to allow for access well into the future.

As the documents will be held first in text files, and then in PDF files, reliability will be as high as any individual computer file. We don't consider reliability to be a potential problem, as multiple copies of all files will be created. Security will only be an issue to the extent that the web site may be hacked and vandalized. Again, since backups will exist, these problems can be fixed.

Scalability is specifically addressed by the LaserFiche system. The capacity of the system is scaled upward by the use of additional storage disks. We intend to store data to CDR disks, which can store up to 700 MB of data. When one is full, it will be labeled and another will be started. If the laptop computer becomes inadequate to manage the project, the existing data can be transferred to a new, updated laptop or desktop.

6) Technical Support

With the LaserFiche system, we will purchase a Software Assurance Plan that covers the software and operation of the system. New releases of the software are included along with installation and training. In addition, a support contract will be purchased for the Canon High Speed Scanner. Since this system is not very complex, we do not feel further technical support will likely be necessary. We feel that a majority of the work will be accomplished within the first year, and by that time we will have any technical issues resolved and we will be fully trained. Once the old records are archived, they will not need to be re-done. We will simply be keeping up with new materials as they become available.

Preliminary Plan for Implementation

7) Sponsors / Stakeholders

The City of Ashland is the sole sponsor of the project. The City has specifically budgeted for the matching funds in the FY2001-2002 budget. We are working together with Aurora, Central City, Waverly and Greenwood to evaluate the success of the project. These communities have each committed to working with us on this project. No financial match is being provided, but advice and discussion will be exchanged in the group.

8) Project Team

Chris Anderson, City Administrator – Anderson will lead the project and transfer documents to the internet. He has maintained numerous web sites in the past, and has approximately 9 years experience with the internet. He has working knowledge of FTP and HTML, which will cover all required skills for developing and maintaining the web site. Anderson will also be involved in the scanning of documents and make decisions on the organization of the system. He will be the primary contact with the other participants in the project.

Bea Kellogg, City Treasurer – Kellogg will lead the effort to scan documents into the system. She currently maintains most of the records of the city, and has adequate computer skills to handle this task.

Mary Ann Brown, Utility Billing Clerk – Brown will assist in the scanning of documents, pull files, and return files. Brown manages the computer billing system of the city.

9) Milestones / Timeline

September 2001   Ashland City Council authorized funding for match

February 15, 2002   Submit Community Technology Fund Application

June 2002   Purchase LaserFiche System and Laptop Computer

July 2002   Complete training and installation of system

August-September, 2002   Scan Ordinances, Resolutions and City
                           Council minutes into the system.

September, 2002	Transfer files to the internet
September, 2002	Meet with partner communities to evaluate progress
October, 2002	Education and Awareness campaign regarding new availability of city documents
October, 2002	Begin scanning remaining city documents into system.
Indefinite	Continue to scan documents, as available

10) Sustainability

The bulk of this project involves creating digital records of existing documents. Once this task has been accomplished, keeping the system current is a dramatically easier job. The routine paperwork will literally take only moments, and should not be a significant burden on any staff member. As 700 MB increments of information is accumulated, new CD's will be burned, and copies will be delivered to our storage sites. The weakest link will probably be the web site. This will require the most significant work. Considering the growing role of the internet in local government, I don't anticipate our commitment to online government being reduced. I can only anticipate an increased demand for online information. Costs related to maintaining an online presence have declined, and the budgetary impact is minimal. Additionally, web authoring and maintenance continues to become more user-friendly and easier to learn. The Ashland City Council has committed to ongoing funding of our online presence.

11) Evaluation Plan

The following components will make up our Evaluation Plan.

1) Physical Progress – We can clearly identify our progress in creating digital records of city documents. There are 924 Ordinances, about 300 Resolutions, and 132 years of City Council minutes. We can easily monitor progress on scanning these documents. When we reach the second phase of scanning, we can visually monitor how many file cabinets and boxes of documents have been scanned.

2) Peer Review – We will call in representatives from Aurora, Central City, Waverly and Greenwood to evaluate our progress. We anticipate receiving valuable advice and suggestions from our contacts in other communities. Since our work will be available on the internet, we can easily receive input from a wide variety of sources.

3) Local Reaction – A component of our program evaluation will be feedback from local residents. We will actively seek suggestions and criticism, particularly in finding errors or broken links in the web site.

4) Document Audit – A group of staff and volunteers will randomly select documents from our files to perform key-word searches on. They will verify that these randomly selected documents are provided when known elements of the document are requested.

5) User Tracking – Software in our internet server allows us to track the level of traffic to all areas of the web site. We can easily track the level of use of the newly developed sections of the web site.

Financial Analysis and Budget (20 points)

The budget will be scored on reasonableness (up to 10 points), mathematical accuracy (up to 5 points), and the strength and appropriateness of the match (up to 5 points).

 Provide the following financial information:

	CTF Grant Funding	Cash Match (5)	In-Kind Match (6)	Other Funding Sources (7)	Total
Personnel Costs(1)			4,100		4,100
Contractual Services (2)					
Capital Expenditures (3) (Hardware, software, etc.)	7,629	2,201			9,830
Supplies and Materials					
Telecommunications					
Training					
Travel					
Other costs (4)		200			200
TOTAL	7,629	2,401	4,100		14,130

Match Percent = 46%

Match Requirement: This grant requires a 20% match. Please calculate your match by using the formula below to ensure your application meets this requirement:

Total Cash Match (A) + Total In-Kind Match (B)
2,401 + 4,100 = 6,501

Total Project Cost (C) 14,130

6,501 / 14,130 = .46

Financial Narrative Notes and Instructions

1. We conservatively estimate that 200 hours of staff time will be necessary for scanning and web site development during 2002.

200 hours x $17.00 per hour average salary = $3,400

200 hours x $3.50 per hour average benefits = $700

    Total salary and benefits = $4,100

3. LaserFiche Executive Software $2,495

    Snapshot Software $ 295

    Adrenaline Capture Engine $ 395

    Canon DR-3020 High Speed Scanner $3,341

    Software Assurance Plan $ 780

    Support Plan – DR-3020 $ 495

        Subtotal LaserFiche System: $7,801

Sony VAIO Laptop Computer, 1 GHz Pentium III processor, 256k RAM, 20GB hard drive, CD-RW, 56k modem, 15" display

                                             $1,549

    Microsoft Office Software $ 480

        Subtotal Computer $2,029

4. Other costs – Advertising costs for the awareness campaign is budgeted for $200

5. The cash match of $2,401 comes from the FY2001-2002 City of Ashland Budget.

6. The in-kind match consists of staff salaries and benefits as outlined in Section 1 of these Financial Notes.